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A risky boundary: Unwanted sexual behaviour among youth

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Abstract *The aim of this research was to explore unwanted sexual behaviour amongs young people. Sexual aggression was operationalized at three levels: "verbal", "non-verbal/intimidating" and "physically violent". A total of 1,700 Dutch adolescents completed a questionnaire that included six clusters of possible determinants of unwanted sexual behaviour: background characteristics, personality characteristics, family environment, school environment, friends and deviant behaviour and sexuality and relationships. We found that victims of unwanted sexual behaviour are often perpetrators, and perpetrators are often victims. The adolescent phase can be a time of sexual exploration for many young people when they explore their own boundaries and those of others. In so doing they run the risk of transgressing boundaries and thereby becoming a victim or perpetrator of unwanted sexual behaviour.*

Keywords *Sexual aggression; unwanted sexual behaviour; sexual victim; sexual offender; adolescents; the Netherlands*

Introduction

In this paper we consider various forms of unwanted sexual behaviour or sexual aggression amongst young people. There is a long tradition of research on sexual abuse and sexual violence against young people as perpetrated by adults (e.g. Draijer, 1988; Langeland & Van der Vlugt, 1990; Wais & Gallé, 1996). One line of research focuses on criminological topics (Bijleveld & Hendriks, 2005; Leuw, Bijleveld & Daalder, 2003). In line with this tradition, Masson and Morrison (1999) state that there are few differences between adolescent sexual offenders and other young males engaged in criminal behaviour. Other authors concentrate on a clinical perspective in order to illuminate the behaviour of sexual offenders (Christodoulides, Richardson, Graham, Kennedy & Kelly, 2005) or to develop therapeutic intervention programmes (Flanagan, 2003). However, considerably less attention has been given to "milder" forms of sexual intimidation and unwanted sexual behaviour, and to those occurring among young people (Small & Kerns, 1993; Walker, 1997). Research on bullying behaviour, for instance, has largely overlooked the possible sexual overtones of such behaviour (Olweus, 1978; van der Meer, 1992).

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In the 1990s there were a few early investigations of unwanted sexual behaviour among youth in the Netherlands, but these were mainly small-sample, qualitative studies (Bajema, 2001). The first Dutch large-scale investigation of unwanted sexual behaviour among youth was conducted only recently (Bajema & Timmerman, 1999). In that study, more than half (52%) of adolescents in their fourth year of secondary school (ages 15–16 years) reported that they had experienced unwanted verbal sexual behaviour in the past year; considerably fewer adolescents had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour of a non-verbal (14%) or physical (19%) nature. Boys had experienced more unwanted verbal sexual behaviour than girls, whereas girls were more likely than boys to have experienced unwanted physical sexual behaviour, or a combination of different forms.

In 2004, we sought to expand on Bajema and Timmerman's (1999) research in a study of 1,700 adolescents. Our study was more systematic, in that it assessed a wide range of risk factors that might influence whether young people fall victim to, or perpetrate, unwanted sexual behaviour involving other young people. Risk factors were identified on the basis of prior research on sexual intimidation, sexual abuse and violence and bullying behaviour. These risk factors or "determinants" as suggested by the literature were then grouped into clusters, yielding the model displayed in Figure 1. In line with this model, we derived hypotheses in relation to specific clusters. The central research question was: what risk factors contribute to the victimization and perpetration of unwanted sexual behaviour among young people?.

Cluster 1: background characteristics. Based on prior research about the impact of gender-role socialization on sexual development and identity, we expected that girls would more often be victims, and boys would more often be perpetrators, of unwanted sexual behaviour (Bajema & Timmerman, 1999; Walker, 1997). Research on bullying behaviour indicates that young

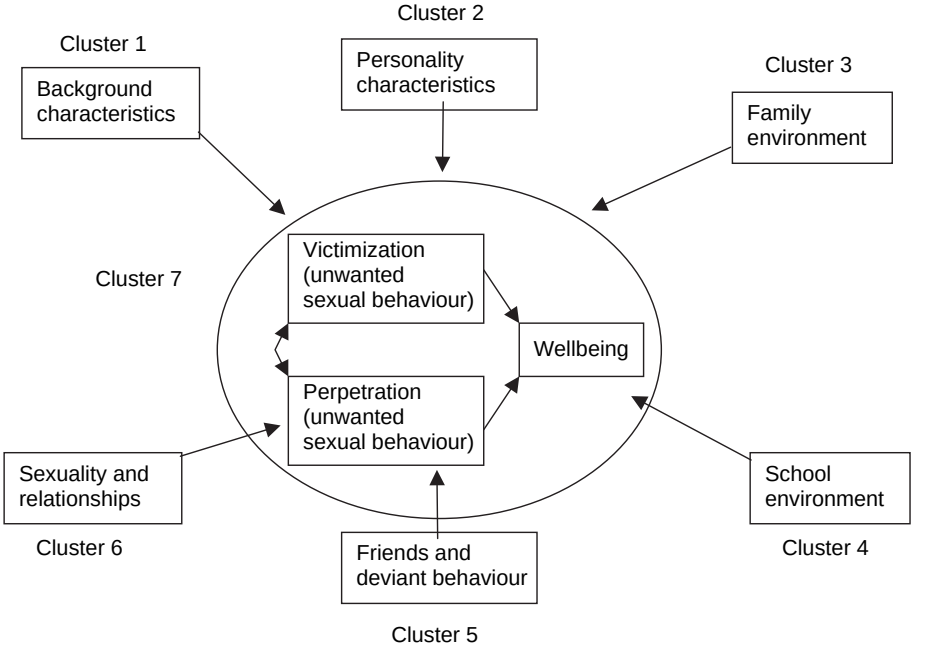

FIGURE 1. *Determinants of unwanted sexual behaviour among youth and wellbeing.*

people receiving lower-level secondary education (e.g. vocational education) and those from families of lower socio-economic status are more likely to be victims as well as perpetrators of violent behaviour (Mooij, 1994). We expected that this would also apply to unwanted sexual behaviour, which can be regarded as a specific form of violent behaviour. As young people grow older they engage in more sexual activities, and as such may be more likely to find themselves in risky situations as a potential victim or perpetrator. Young people with strong religious beliefs may harbour less permissive views on sexuality, and so be less likely than non-religious youth to encounter such situations. The absence of one or both parents is a risk factor for victimization and perpetration of sexual abuse (Cence, 1997; Schaffer, 2001) and as such this risk factor could also apply to unwanted sexual behaviour among youth.

Cluster 2: personality characteristics. Neurotic personality characteristics have been identified in profiles of victims as well as perpetrators of bullying and other forms of unwanted sexual behaviour (Cence, 1997; Olweus, 1987). Victims tend to display more introverted characteristics (insecure, quiet behaviour; social isolation; docility; altruistic behaviour) and perpetrators tend to display more extraverted characteristics (aggressive, impulsive, dominant behaviour).

Cluster 3: family environment. Numerous studies indicate that young people who have been sexually abused tend to come from dysfunctional families (Kellogg, Burge & Taylor, 2000). Such families are often characterized by difficult parental relationships and problematic parent–child relationships, with little affection expressed between parents and children and frequent physical abuse (Cence, 1997). It also appears that perpetrators of bullying have often grown up in problematic family circumstances characterized, for instance, by an authoritarian parenting style, poor relationships between children and parents and family violence (Langeland & Van der Vlugt, 1990; Wais & Gallé, 1996). Lack of parental supervision or monitoring is another risk factor for victimization and perpetration of sexual abuse (Small & Kerns, 1993). On the whole, we expected that positive qualities of the family environment would exert a protective, preventive influence on whether an adolescent experiences unwanted sexual behaviour either as victim or perpetrator.

Cluster 4: school environment. The social bond linking a young person to his or her school (as expressed in scholastic motivation and perceptions of the general climate at school) appears to be a source of influence on deviant behaviour (Bronneman-Helmers, Herweijers & Vogels, 2002; Mooij, 1994, 2001). For instance, low scholastic motivation, truancy, suspension from school and repeating a school year are all related to problem behaviours such as bullying and violent behaviour. Victims of bullying, in turn, tend to have more negative perceptions of the school climate, despite their relatively high scholastic motivation. We suspected that the same relationships could hold for unwanted sexual behaviour among youth: i.e. perpetrators of deviant behaviour such as bullying may be more likely to display unwanted sexual behaviour as well, and victims of bullying may also be vulnerable in the sexual domain.

Cluster 5: friends and deviant behaviour. Numerous studies indicate that young people with friends who engage in deviant behaviour are themselves more likely to engage in deviant behaviour (Custers & Engels, 2003). Compared with other adolescents, delinquent young people show greater conformity to the (deviant) behaviour of their friends (Wit, van der Veer & Slot, 1999). Some research suggests that such young people tend to have closer, more intimate friendships (Houtzager & Baerveldt, 1999), whereas other research suggests the opposite, namely that they are unable to form close friendships (Hirschi, 1974). We expected that some

unwanted sexual behaviour among young people occurs in a group context, often involving youth together with their friends, and that such groups of friends may together engage in other types of deviant behaviour as well. Small and Kerns (1993) found that adolescents who reported higher peer conformity were more vulnerable to unwanted sexual activity.

Cluster 6: sexuality and relationships. Youth may be more likely to run into problems if they start experimenting with sexual behaviour before they have received sufficient sex education (Rosenthal & Peart, 1996). This applies both to potential victims and to potential perpetrators. Ignorant, naive young people may be more likely to be victimized by unwanted sexual behaviour than peers who have been sufficiently informed about sexual matters by their parents or school (Cence, 1997). We also expected that young people with traditional views on gender roles—for whom sexuality may be an issue dominated by taboos—might encounter more problems. Young people who have not learned how to avoid unwanted sex or talk about sex (e.g. to communicate their own sexual boundaries or to accept the boundaries expressed by others) may be more likely than other young people to become victims or perpetrators of unwanted sexual behaviour. Adolescents who enjoy challenging others with sexually explicit remarks may be more likely to transgress behavioural boundaries as well. Young people who start dating at an early age and are sexually active for a longer time, or who are more active sexually, also appear to experience more unwanted sexual behaviour (Brugman, Goedhart, Vogels & Van Zessen, 1995; Vicary, Klingaman & Harkness, 1995). In this regard, young people with more casual sexual contacts, or who enter into sexual relationships more quickly, could also be at higher risk. Individuals who have had unpleasant sexual experiences may also be more likely to encounter unwanted sexual behaviour. This is in line with Luster and Small (1997), who found that adolescent female victims of past and current sexual abuse had more sexual partners during the past year.

Cluster 7: unwanted sexual behaviour among young people and wellbeing. This cluster comprises the main dependent variables. Following Bajema and Timmerman (1999) and Timmerman (2004), we were interested in diverse gradations of unwanted sexual behaviour: verbal behaviour (e.g. unwelcome sexual jokes or remarks), non-verbal behaviour (e.g. standing too close to someone, confronting someone with pornographic images) or physically violent behaviour (e.g. assault or rape). We investigated the influence of various risk factors on both victimization and perpetration of unwanted sexual behaviour. We expected to find a positive association between these two outcome variables. Research on bullying indicates that young people in an environment where bullying behaviour is common often engage in bullying for self-protection. It appears that perpetrators of sexual abuse have often been victims themselves (Bagley, Wood & Young, 1994; Breer, 1987). Similarly, victims of unwanted sexual behaviour often display similar behaviour towards others (Steinberg, 1999). Finally, we investigated to what extent young people who have been a victim or perpetrator of unwanted sexual behaviour experience negative effects on their wellbeing. Prior research concentrates on the psychological health and maladjustment effects of victimization of unwanted sexual experiences (Garnefski & Arends, 1998; Timmerman, 2004).

Method

Respondents

The respondents were 1,700 adolescents (48% boys; 52% girls) in their fourth year of secondary school in the Netherlands. Their ages ranged from 14 to 18 years, but the majority

(85%) were between 15 and 16 years old. All respondents attended one of 14 schools spread over five provinces. (A total of 63 schools, selected randomly from the yellow pages of the telephone book, had been invited to participate in the study.) The respondents were roughly evenly divided over the three levels of secondary education in the Netherlands: vocational ($n = 572$); general ($n = 578$); and pre-university ($n = 550$). A questionnaire (consisting mainly of questions with fixed answer categories) was completed during class hours in the presence of one of the researchers, who explained that the questionnaires would be handled confidentially and that respondents would be anonymous. Respondents in their fourth year of secondary school were selected so that the same age category could be investigated at all three educational levels. Moreover, middle adolescence is a phase when many young people become sexually active and may begin to experience unwanted sexual behaviour involving their age peers.

Measures

The model developed for this research distinguishes the seven clusters of variables as discussed in the previous section.

Cluster 1: background characteristics. The questionnaire included measures of (a) age (in years), (b) gender (1 = girl, 2 = boy), (c) educational level (1 = vocational, 2 = general, 3 = pre-university), (d) religiousness [0 = not religious (48%), 1 = religious (52%)] and ethnicity [0 = Dutch (87%), 1 = non-Dutch (13%)]. Non-Dutch respondents were defined as those born outside the Netherlands, or those with at least one parent born outside the Netherlands. Respondents were also asked about the highest educational level attained by each parent (e, f) [1 = low (primary education only, or lower vocational secondary education), 2 = medium (general or pre-university secondary education only, or mid-level vocational education), 3 = high (upper-level vocational education, or university)] and whether each parent engaged in paid employment outside the home (g, h) [1 = not employed, 2 = part-time (32 or fewer hours per week), 3 = full-time (more than 32 hours per week)]. Most of the adolescents lived with both parents [(i) "non-traditional home": 1 = with father and mother (85%), 2 = all other situations (15%, most of whom reported living with their divorced mother)].

Cluster 2: personality characteristics. Personality characteristics were measured with items based on "The Big Five" (Costa & McCray, 1992; Steinberg, 1999), which distinguishes five dimensions (neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness). Based on a review of literature on the psychological characteristics of victims and perpetrators of unwanted sexual behaviour, three of these dimensions were selected and measured with substantially shortened versions of scales from the NEO Personality Inventory [Costa & MacCray, 1992; six items per dimension, with response categories ranging from 1 (entirely disagree) to 5 (entirely agree)]. Two scales could be constructed from these items: (a) "neurotic personality characteristics" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.73$; six items, e.g. "I often feel anxious or concerned", "I often feel angry about how others treat me"); (b) "social personality characteristics" [Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64$; a composite of seven agreeableness and extraversion items (no reliable scale could be formed for either dimension separately), e.g. "In general I try to be conscientious and caring", "I like to have a lot of other people around me"].

Cluster 3: family environment. Family environment was measured with Van Wel's (1994) "parental bond scale", together with items concerning affection, supervision, and autonomy as aspects of parenting style (from Bajema & Timmerman, 1999). These items yielded six

scales [with response categories from 1 (entirely disagree) to 5 (entirely agree)]: (a) "youth's bond with mother" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$); (b) "youth's bond with father" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$; both parental bond scales consisted of 17 items, e.g. "I consider my mother/father one of my best friends", "I show very clearly that I care about my mother/father"); (c) "Parents' mutual affection" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$; eight items, e.g. "My mother/father often hugs or kisses my father/mother"; "My mother/father often gets annoyed with my father/mother"); (d) "parental supervision" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$; 14 items, e.g. "My mother/father always wants to know where I am"; "My mother/father knows exactly which friends I spend time with"); (e) "support in gaining autonomy" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$; four items concerning the degree to which parents support the youth in his/her journey towards greater independence, e.g. "My mother/father encourages me to be independent"). A final scale was developed especially for this research: (f) "violent family climate" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$; six items, e.g. "My mother/father never hits me").

Cluster 4: school environment. The environment at school was assessed in several ways. Two scales (from Bajema & Timmerman, 1999) measured the adolescent's bond with his or her school [with response categories from 1 (entirely disagree) to 5 (entirely agree)]: (a) "school climate" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$; 10 items, e.g. "I am very happy at school", "There is a very good atmosphere at my school") and (b) "scholastic motivation" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.71$; five items, e.g. "I always do my best at school"). Scholastic success was measured with two items from research by Mooij (1994) concerning (c) repeating a school year and (d) suspension or expulsion from school (response categories: no/yes).

Items measuring bullying and aggressive behaviour were also borrowed from Mooij"s (1994) research (however, the response categories were altered: 0 = never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often). Four items formed the scale (e) "perpetrator of bullying and violent behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.65$; e.g. "I bully other students", "I behave violently towards other students"). Two items about victimization did not load together to form a scale and so were used as separate variables in the analyses: (f) "victim of bullying behaviour" ("I am bullied by other students") and (g) "victim of violent behaviour" ("Other students behave violently towards me").

Cluster 5: friends and deviant behaviour. First, the adolescents were asked whether they had (a) a best friend [not their boy- or girlfriend; 0 = no (11%), 1 = yes (89%)], and (b) whether this friend had ever been arrested or held by the police [0 = no/not applicable (90%), 1 = yes (10%)]. They were also asked (c) how many good friends they had [1 = 1–5 friends (34%), 2 = 6–10 friends (44%), 3 = > 10 friends (22%)] and (d) how many of these friends had been arrested or held by the police [1 = 0 friends (75%), 2 = 1 friend (9%), 3 = 2 or more friends (15%)]. These questions were taken from research by Noom et al. (1996). In addition, a scale was developed to measure the closeness of the adolescent's bond with his/her friends: (e) "youth's bond with friends" [Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$; 10 items, e.g. "I can talk about things really well with my friends", "My friends often show that they truly care about me"; response categories from 1 (entirely disagree) to 5 (entirely agree)]. For this scale items about the bond with parents were reformulated for the category friends. Also, a scale was developed to measure (f) "conformity to friends" [based on Bajema & Timmerman, 1999; with adjusted response categories varying from 1 (never) to 5 (very often); Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64$; five items, e.g. "Once you belong to a group, you have to go along and do what they do"].

Finally, items were borrowed from research by Noom et al. (1996) to measure the degree to which the adolescents themselves engaged in deviant behaviour [with response categories

from 1 (never) to 5 (very often)]: (g) "mildly deviant behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$; seven items, e.g. "Stolen something from someone", "Intentionally destroyed something belonging to someone else"), (h) "severely deviant behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.69$; five items, e.g. "Beat up or threatened to beat up someone else, for no good reason", "Was arrested or held by the police").

Cluster 6: sexuality and relationships: sex instruction, attitudes, behaviour. Issues of sexuality were operationalized in three ways. First, the adolescents were asked about sex education they had received, following Bajema and Timmerman (1999): (a) "sex education from parents" [Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$; concerning whether they had been informed by their mother or father in six topic areas (e.g. reproduction, AIDS, contraception); response categories: no/yes]; (b) "sex education at school" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$; concerning whether they had been informed in the same six topic areas by their school).

Secondly, the adolescents were asked for their opinions on the relationship between the sexes in general, and sexual relationships in particular. These opinions were measured with items from Knijn and Van Wel (2001), Bajema and Timmerman (1999) and Davis (1998), as well as a few newly developed items [with response categories from 1 (entirely disagree) to 5 (entirely agree)]: (c) "traditional views on gender roles" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$; four items, e.g. "Caring for children, that is mainly women's work", "Paid employment and a career, that is mainly for men"); (d) "establishing sexual boundaries" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.68$; six items, e.g. "In the sexual domain I have never done anything I didn't want to do"); (e) "respecting sexual boundaries" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.69$; five items, e.g. "If another person says she/he does not want to engage in a certain sexual act, then I respect that"); (f) "provocative sexual behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$; four items, e.g. "I think it's fun to make sexually explicit remarks towards or about other youth").

Thirdly, the adolescents were asked about their sexual experiences in four domains: (i) French kissing (i.e. kissing with mouth open); (ii) caressing under the clothes; (iii) kissing and caressing without clothes, touching genitals, masturbation; (iv) sexual intercourse. Some of the items were taken from Brugman et al. (1995) and Veuger (1997), but most were newly developed. (g) "Number of steady relationships": the adolescents were asked about the number of people with whom they had had a steady romantic relationship (scored as follows: 1 = 0; 2 = 1; 3 = 2; 4 = 3–4; 5 = >4 people). (h) "Number of sexual contacts" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$; the adolescents were asked: "With how many different people have you had sexual contact?". This question was posed separately in relation to each of the above four domains of sexual experience (0 = none, 1 = 1–2 people, 2 = > 2 people)]. (i) "Number of sexual experiences" [Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$; the adolescents were asked "How many times have you had sexual contact of the following types?", separately in relation to each of the four domains of sexual experience (0 = never, 1 = a few times, 2 = often)]. Questions were also posed about the (j) "number of casual sexual contacts" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$; "How many times have you had sexual contact with someone of your age who was not a steady boyfriend/girlfriend?"), separately in relation to each of the four domains of sexual experience (0 = never, 1 = a few times, 2 = often). (k) "Young age at first sexual experiences" [Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$; this scale measured the degree to which the adolescents started sexual relations "early", based on their answers to the question "How old were you when you first had the following types of sexual contact with someone else?", separately in relation to each of the four domains of sexual experience (0 = not applicable, 1 > 14 years old, 2 ≤ 14 years old)]. (l) "Duration from entering steady relationship to sexual relationship" [Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$; this scale measures the speed with which a new relationship usually develops into a sexual relationship, separately in relation to the four domains of sexual experience (1 = on the first date, 2 = within

a month, 3 = within 6 months, 4 = after 6 months, 5 = after marriage)]. Finally, a scale was developed to measure (m) "unpleasant sexual contact with other youth" [Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.61$; "How often have you found it unpleasant to have sexual contact with someone your age?", separately in relation to the four domains of sexual experience (0 = never, 1 = a few times, 2 = often)].

Cluster 7: unwanted sexual behaviour among young people and wellbeing. Following Bajema and Timmerman (1999) and Timmerman (2003), both victimization and perpetration of unwanted sexual behaviour were operationalized at three levels: "verbal", "non-verbal/intimidating", and "physically violent". The adolescents were asked whether, in the previous 12 months, they had been the target of various types of unpleasant or disturbing remarks from, or other behaviours by, other youth, and whether they had themselves engaged in such behaviours. Each question was posed separately in relation to four situations: at school, not at school; perpetration by one person, perpetration by a group (response categories: 0 = never, 1 = a few times, 2 = often). These items yielded six scales: (a) "victim of unwanted verbal sexual behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$; 28 items concerning seven types of unwanted verbal sexual behaviour, e.g. "annoying sexual jokes", "annoying sexual remarks about specific body parts such as my breasts, penis, or buttocks", with each question posed separately in relation to the four situations). (b) "Victim of non-verbal/intimidating sexual behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$; 28 items concerning seven types of non-verbal intimidating sexual behaviour, e.g. "Undressed me with his/her eyes, or ogled, leered or stared at me in a disturbing way", "Made disturbing sexual gestures towards me", with each question posed separately in relation to all four situations). (c) "Victim of physically violent sexual behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$; 20 items concerning five forms of physically violent sexual behaviour, e.g. "Kissed me against my will", "Forced me to have sexual intercourse", with each question posed separately in relation to the four situations).

The three scales measuring perpetration of unwanted sexual behaviour contained exactly the same items, except that the respondent was asked whether, in the past 12 months, he or she had made such remarks or engaged in such behaviours towards other youth, with each question again posed in relation to all four situations: (d) "perpetrator of unwanted verbal sexual behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$), (e) "perpetrator of non-verbal/intimidating sexual behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$) and (f) "perpetrator of physically violent sexual behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$). The three scales of victimization were so strongly correlated that they were combined to form a single scale: (g) "victim of unwanted sexual behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$). The three scales measuring perpetration were also merged into a single scale: (h) "perpetrator of unwanted sexual behaviour" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$). Therefore, both scales include a continuum of abusive behaviour, varying from very mild to very severe forms of unwanted sexual attention or sexual violence.

Finally, questions about wellbeing were posed with two scales [with response categories from 1 (entirely disagree) to 5 (entirely agree); see Knijn & Van Wel, 1999, 2001]. (a) "Satisfaction" measures the degree to which one is a happy person and satisfied with one's life (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$; three items, e.g. "My life is going well", "I am a happy person"). (b) "Depressive feelings" measures the degree to which one experiences feelings of depression, disinterest and low self-worth (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.71$; four items, e.g. "I am deeply unhappy and depressed", "I fret about everything, and don't like what I see happening around me"). Together these two scales formed the scale (c) "wellbeing" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$).

Results

Many of the adolescents in this study had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in the preceding 12 months. More than 75% reported having been subjected to unwanted sexual behaviour of a verbal nature during that period (girls: 76%; boys: 75%). 60% had been a victim of non-verbal/intimidating sexual behaviour (girls: 71%; boys: 47%) and 23% a victim of some form of unwanted physically violent sexual behaviour (girls: 23%; boys: 16%). Only 1.6%, i.e. 28 adolescents, reported being forced into sexual intercourse, the most extreme form of unwanted physically violent sexual behaviour.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of the adolescents indicated that they had acted as a perpetrator of unwanted verbal sexual behaviour in the preceding 12 months (girls: 54%; boys: 72%). One-third (36%) reported they had made a transgression in the domain of non-verbal/intimidating behaviour (girls: 29%; boys: 43%) and one-fourth (28%) admitted to having engaged in physically violent sexual behaviour (girls: 19%; boys: 37%). Only a small group of adolescents, 0.8%, i.e. 13 respondents, reported the most extreme form of such behaviour in that they stated they had forced someone into sexual intercourse.

Overall, victimization and perpetration showed a significant positive correlation (Pearson's $r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$); the same relationship was also evident in each of the three domains of unwanted sexual behaviour. The more experience an adolescent had as a *victim*, the lower his or her self-reported wellbeing was (Pearson's $r = -0.20$, $p < 0.01$). In the case of perpetration, however, there was no such association with perceived wellbeing.

What factors influence victimization and perpetration of unwanted sexual behaviour amongst young people? We shall discuss these influences in relation to the model depicted in Figure 1 and presented in the introduction, beginning with victimization. Table I displays the bivariate (correlational) relationships between the various determinants and unwanted sexual behaviour, as well as their unique influence when other determinants were controlled for in regression analyses. Our presentation focuses on the determinants of victimization and perpetration as identified in these regression analyses.

Victimization by unwanted sexual behaviour. As was expected, girls more often fell victim to unwanted sexual behaviour than boys (cluster 1). Also, non-Dutch adolescents and those at lower educational levels more often reported being a victim of such behaviour, as did adolescents whose fathers worked relatively few hours outside the home. Neurotic personality characteristics were also associated positively with victimization (cluster 2).

Considering the family environment (cluster 3), it appears that the adolescent's bond with his or her parents did not exert an influence when other indicators of family climate had been taken into account. Adolescents who perceived less affection between their parents, and those experiencing a violent family climate, were more likely to fall victim to unwanted sexual behaviour. Perhaps surprisingly, strong parental supervision was also positively associated with perceptions of victimization (although this association was not evident in the bivariate correlation).

Adolescents who had repeated a school year were less likely to be victims of unwanted sexual behaviour (cluster 4); these adolescents attended school with younger peers, and as such may have found themselves better able to defend themselves. Adolescents who reported being victims of bullying and violent behaviour were also more likely to report that they were victims of unwanted sexual behaviour.

Adolescents whose best friend engaged in deviant behaviour were less likely to be victims of unwanted sexual behaviour; remarkably, however, youth who themselves engaged in

Table I. *Determinants of unwanted sexual behaviour among youth.*

	Victimization: unwanted sexual behaviour		Perpetration: unwanted sexual behaviour	
Determinants	*r*	β	*r*	β
Cluster 1: background characteristics				
a. Age	−0.02	−0.03	−0.01	−0.01
b. Gender	−0.09***	−0.09***	0.24***	0.10***
c. Educational level	−0.18***	−0.07**	−0.20***	−0.04
d. Religiousness	−0.03	0.03	−0.06*	0.00
e. Ethnicity	0.08**	0.06**	0.05	0.03
f. Educational level: mother	−0.02	0.02	−0.11***	−0.06**
g. Educational level: father	−0.05*	−0.01	−0.10***	−0.04
h. Paid work outside home: mother	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.01
i. Paid work outside home: father	−0.13***	−0.07**	−0.05	−0.04
j. Non-traditional home	0.08**	−0.01	0.04	−0.00
Cluster 2: personality characteristics				
a. Neurotic personality characteristics	0.22***	0.07**	0.01	0.01
b. Social personality characteristics	−0.03	−0.01	0.04	0.08***
Cluster 3: family environment				
a. Youth's bond with mother	−0.14***	−0.02	−0.12***	−0.00
b. Youth's bond with father	−0.13***	0.04	−0.06**	0.00
c. Parents' mutual affection	−0.14***	−0.05*	−0.10***	−0.04
d. Parental supervision	0.01	0.06*	−0.09***	0.03
e. Support in gaining autonomy	−0.06*	0.01	−0.05	0.04
f. Violent family climate	0.15***	0.07**	0.13***	0.01
Cluster 4: school environment				
a. School climate	−0.15***	−0.03	−0.16***	−0.05*
b. Scholastic motivation	−0.14***	−0.01	−0.22***	0.01
c. Repeating a school year	−0.03	−0.08**	0.01	−0.07**
d. Suspension/expulsion	0.13***	0.01	0.16***	0.01
e. Perpetrator of bullying and violent behaviour	0.19***	0.03	0.38***	0.14***
f. Victim of bullying behaviour	0.12***	0.07**	0.01	−0.01
g. Victim of violent behaviour	0.13***	0.05*	0.09***	0.01
Cluster 5: friends and deviant behaviour				
a. Having a best friend	−0.01	−0.02	−0.02	−0.03
b. Deviant behaviour: best friend	0.07**	−0.08**	0.20***	−0.05*
c. Number of good friends	−0.00	−0.00	0.12***	−0.00
d. Number of good friends with deviant behaviour	0.12***	−0.00	0.28***	−0.03
e. Youth's bond with friends	0.01	0.03	−0.02	0.01
f. Conformity to friends	0.09***	0.05*	0.13***	0.05*
g. Mildly deviant behaviour: youth	0.27***	0.09**	0.44***	0.15***
h. Severely deviant behaviour: youth	0.24***	0.12***	0.40***	0.10***
Cluster 6: sexuality and relationships				
a. Sex education from parents	0.07**	0.05*	0.04	0.03
b. Sex education at school	−0.03	−0.03	0.03	0.02
c. Traditional views on gender-roles	0.00	−0.02	0.21***	0.05*
d. Establishing sexual boundaries	−0.24***	−0.09***	−0.10***	0.01
e. Respecting sexual boundaries	−0.05*	0.01	−0.21***	−0.05*
f. Attitude on provocative sexual behaviour	0.15***	0.07**	0.36***	0.20***
g. Number of steady relationships	0.17***	0.04	0.17***	−0.01
h. Number of different sexual contacts	0.28***	−0.09	0.27***	−0.01
i. Number of sexual experiences	0.26***	0.09	0.23***	−0.01
j. Number of casual sexual contacts	0.31***	0.14***	0.34***	0.14***
k. Age at first sexual experiences	0.29***	0.01	0.27***	0.01
l. Duration from steady to sexual relationship	−0.16***	0.04	−0.24***	0.05
m. Unpleasant sexual contact with other youth	0.41***	0.27***	0.17***	0.10***
R^2		0.34		0.36

n = 1,700. Pearson's *r* and standardized β-coefficients: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

(mildly or severely) deviant behaviour were more likely to be a victim (cluster 5). Adolescents who reported greater conformity to their friends also reported more victimization.

Finally, cluster 6 includes several determinants in the domain of sexuality and relationships. Adolescents who had been better informed by their parents on sexual matters were, surprisingly, somewhat more often victims. To the extent that an adolescent felt less capable of expressing sexual boundaries, he or she was more likely to fall victim. Finally, adolescents with more positive attitudes about provocative sexual behaviour, and those who reported more casual sexual contacts or more unpleasant sexual experiences, were more likely than their peers to report that they had been a victim of unwanted sexual behaviour. Many other predicted determinants in the domain of sexuality and relationships showed significant bivariate correlations with victimization, but were found to be less meaningful when the other factors in the model were taken into account.

Together, the determinants under investigation accounted for 34% of the variance in victimization; this means that they explain the response pattern of victimization for about a third. We therefore may conclude that the explanatory power of the model is reasonably good.

Perpetration of unwanted sexual behaviour. Whereas girls were more likely be victims of unwanted sexual behaviour, boys were more likely to be perpetrators. Of the other background characteristics in cluster 1, only educational level of the mother showed a (negative) association with perpetration when the other factors in the model were taken into account. Perpetrators of unwanted sexual behaviour scored higher on the social personality characteristics scale (cluster 2).

Although many significant correlations were observed between perpetration and indicators of the family environment, these variables appeared less meaningful when the other factors in the model were taken into account (cluster 3). With regard to the school environment (cluster 4), negative perceptions of school climate were associated with perpetration. Perpetrators were also less commonly found among those who had repeated a school year. To the extent that adolescents engaged in more bullying and violent behaviour towards their peers, they were also more likely to be a perpetrator of unwanted sexual behaviour.

Perpetration showed the same associations with friends and deviant behaviour as did victimization (cluster 5). Adolescents whose best friend engaged in deviant behaviour were less likely to be perpetrators of unwanted sexual behaviour, whereas youth who themselves engaged in (mildly or severely) deviant behaviour were more likely to be perpetrators. Adolescents who reported greater conformity to their friends were also more likely to be perpetrators.

Finally, considering cluster 6 (sexuality and relationships), it appears that adolescents with more traditional ideas about gender roles were more often perpetrators, as were those who could less easily accept others' sexual boundaries and above all those with positive attitudes towards provocative sexual behaviour. Adolescents with more casual sexual contacts and more unpleasant sexual experiences were not only more often victims, but also more often perpetrators, of unwanted sexual behaviour. As was found for victimization, many other predicted determinants in the domain of sexuality and relationships showed significant bivariate correlations with perpetration, yet did not yield improved explanation when the other factors in the model were taken into account.

Together, the sources of influence identified in the model accounted for 36% of the variance in perpetration; this means that they explain the response pattern of perpetration for more than a third. We therefore may conclude that the explanatory power of the model is reasonably good.

Discussion and conclusion

The central question addressed in this study was: what risk factors contribute to victimization and perpetration of unwanted sexual behaviour amongst young people? In order to answer this question we have developed a model that integrates a wide variety of factors that, according to our review of the literature, could influence unwanted sexual behaviour. Of course, the various factors in the clusters are likely to interact together, but we have focused our analyses on the effects of those variables on unwanted sexual behaviour. Moreover, it is plausible that there be some interaction between those influences and unwanted sexual behaviour, but this possibility is neglected in the analyses currently presented. We cannot solve the problem of "cause and effect" definitely, because our study is not longitudinal. Nevertheless, we hope that we have made plausible in our model the supposed direction of the influences on unwanted sexual behaviour. We also have displayed the bivariate (correlational) relationships between the various determinants and unwanted sexual behaviour. Our main aim was to get an overall picture of all the possible risk factors that are related to victimization and perpetration of unwanted sexual behaviour amongst young people.

We have tried to answer our central question by a self-report questionnaire. This method has some limitations, particularly regarding possible over- or under-reporting of unwanted sexual behaviours. Fear, self-blame and embarrassment may hinder disclosure of such experiences (Kellogg & Hoffman, 1995; Kellogg & Huston, 1995). It is possible that men report "gender harassment" (rude and sexist remarks) less than women owing to their more tolerant view on such behaviour (Corr & Jackson, 2001). However, our main focus is not on reporting the exact amount of such behaviour, but on the connection of those reported experiences in this field with a variety of explanatory variables. The suggestion that girls will over-report "victim" experiences as a result of socialization processes, while boys will deny and therefore under-report them, is an interesting one, but we cannot make a difference between "facts" and "experiences"; the reported experiences are empirically the only facts.

All in all, we found much higher percentages of victimization of unwanted sexual behaviour than another recent Dutch national survey among young people that reported that 18% of females and 4% of males under the age of 25 were ever forced into sexual acts (De Graaf, Meijer, Poelman & Vanwesenbeeck, 2005). In our study, 28% of girls and 16% of boys reported that they had been a victim of some form of physically violent sexual behaviour in the preceding 12 months. These different results could be explained partly by different formulations (i.e. "forced into sex" as opposed to "performing sexual acts against one's will").

Before discussing our most important findings in relation to prior research further, we will stop to consider a noteworthy implication of our study: victims of unwanted sexual behaviour are often perpetrators, and perpetrators are often victims. This pattern is consistent with what is known about adolescent sexual offenders, who in many cases have themselves been victims of sexual abuse (Breer, 1987). This raises the question of whether unwanted sexual behaviour develops in the same way from victimization to perpetration. Young people might also find themselves in both roles at the same time, for instance when sexual exploration leads to risky situations where they find themselves reciprocating behaviours they have endured.

This perspective sheds light on a number of the relationships in the domain of "sexuality and relationships" (cluster 6 in the model). Adolescent victims *and* perpetrators of unwanted sexual behaviour reported having had more casual sexual contacts and more unpleasant sexual experiences, yet expressed greater tolerance for provocative sexual remarks and behaviour. Whereas young victims had more difficulty establishing boundaries in the domain of sexuality, young perpetrators—who also hold more traditional views on

relationships—were less inclined to accept boundaries expressed by others. Other research on sexual intimidation, abuse, and violence has also shown that perpetrators harbor traditional gender-role views (Wiehe & Richards, 1995).

Following in the footsteps of Cence (1997), who found that victims of sexual abuse often have insufficient knowledge of sexual matters, we assumed that sex education from parents or the school would help protect adolescents from falling into roles as victim or perpetrator of unwanted sexual behaviour. Nevertheless, we found no evidence of such a preventive effect. In the case of victimization, the association with sex education from parents was slightly positive—contrary to our expectations. It may be that the role of parents here is one of "secondary" prevention, in that victims of unwanted sexual behaviour may discuss sexual topics with their parents afterwards, in an attempt to share their problems.

Our model distinguishes five other clusters of determinants. We now consider these clusters in turn, beginning with cluster 1 (background characteristics). Consistent with other research (Bajema & Timmerman, 1999), girls were more often victims and boys more often perpetrators of unwanted sexual behaviour. Adolescents studying at lower educational levels felt more victimized by unwanted sexual behaviour than adolescents at higher educational levels. This is consistent with research on bullying, which has shown that less educated youth are more often victims and perpetrators of bullying behaviour (Mooij, 1994). In the case of perpetration of unwanted sexual behaviour, we observed a similar bivariate association with educational level, although this relationship disappeared in the regression analyses controlling for other sources of influence. Similarly, we observed only partial support for the notion that lower socio-economic status (operationalized as parents' educational level and labour force participation) or non-traditional family circumstances (Cence, 1997; Schaffer, 2001) form risk factors for victimization and perpetration of unwanted sexual behaviour. (Only two such relationships were observed in the regression analyses: negative associations between victimization and father's labour participation and between perpetration and mother's educational level.) Contrary to our predictions, age and religiousness did not show relationships with unwanted sexual behaviour. We did find that non-Dutch adolescents more often reported being a victim of unwanted behaviour than Dutch adolescents. It is not clear which culture-specific factors or mechanisms might have been responsible for this finding, which concerns a diverse and relatively small subgroup (namely, 13%) of our respondent sample.

Cluster 2, personality characteristics, was included to shed additional light on the psychological profile of perpetrators and victims. Contrary to what has been found in research on bullying and other types of unwanted sexual behaviour (Cence, 1997; Olweus, 1987), we observed more neurotic characteristics among victims—but not perpetrators—of unwanted sexual behaviour. Perpetrators appear to possess more "social" personality characteristics; from this perspective their unwanted sexual behaviour might be viewed as an extreme form of extraversion.

Based on previous research (Cence, 1997; Langeland & Van der Vlugt, 1990; Wais & Gallé, 1996) we expected that positive qualities of the family environment (cluster 3) would play a protective role in determining whether adolescents become victims or perpetrators of unwanted sexual behaviour. Most of the bivariate (correlational) associations between family environment and unwanted sexual behaviour were in fact significant, but when considered together with other variables in the model they did not contribute uniquely to the explanation of unwanted sexual behaviour. The regression analyses did not reveal any independent relationships between perpetration and the indicators of family environment; only a poor mutual relationship between parents and a violent family climate appeared to foster victimization. Surprisingly, there was a positive association between parental supervision

and victimization. This could reflect (as we already observed in relation to sex education from parents) "secondary" prevention (or post-hoc protectiveness), as parents may exert stronger supervision only after their child has fallen victim to unwanted sexual behaviour.

Previous research suggests that deviant behaviour by young people is related to a number of school-related factors (Bronneman-Helmers, Herweijers & Vogels, 2002; Mooij, 1994, 2001). Although the same seems to apply to unwanted sexual behaviour at the correlational level, the regression analyses showed a relationship between only perpetration and negative perceptions of school climate. Adolescents who had repeated a school year were less likely to be either a perpetrator or a victim (although this was not evident at the correlational level). Perhaps these older adolescents were better able to stay clear of the frictions leading to unwanted sexual behaviour among their younger classmates. In any case, victimization and perpetration of such behaviour appear to be embedded in a broader pattern of victimization and perpetration of bullying and violent behaviour.

The results concerning friends and deviant behaviour (cluster 5) unexpectedly showed the same pattern for victims and perpetrators. To the extent that an adolescent engaged in more deviant behaviour (varying from mild to severe), he or she was more likely to be a victim or perpetrator of unwanted sexual behaviour. This suggests that youth who more frequently enter risky situations and cross risky boundaries have a higher chance of being involved in unwanted sexual behaviour, whether as victim or as perpetrator. Similarly, there were positive correlations between having deviant friends and both victimization and perpetration. Surprisingly, however, when all other sources of influence were controlled for, adolescents whose best friend had been arrested or held by the police tended to be less involved in unwanted sexual behaviour. This is contrary to what one would expect, as prior research suggests a positive relationship between deviant behaviour by young people and deviant behaviour by their friends (Custers & Engels, 2003). Finally, adolescents who showed greater conformity to their friends were more likely to be both victims and perpetrators. This could be because much unwanted sexual behaviour occurs in a group context.

In conclusion, our study suggests that it is not possible to contrast sharply adolescents who are in need of therapeutic intervention, either as a victim or perpetrator of unwanted sexual behaviour, from those who "just make a mistake" in sexually experimenting. The adolescent phase is a time of sexual exploration for many young people; a time for exploring their own boundaries and those of others, not only in real-life situations but also in the virtual reality of online sex (such as the internet, chatrooms and webcams, each of which represents an interesting phenomenon for further research). In so doing they run the chance of transgressing risky boundaries and thereby becoming a victim or perpetrator of unwanted sexual behaviour. "It has happened to me a couple of times. . ., but I won't let it happen again", wrote one respondent assertively on the back of the questionnaire. We hope that the present research contributes to greater recognition of this problem, just as prior research once raised awareness of bullying behaviour.

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